



Montgomery County Council

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Contact: Patrick Lacefield 240-777-7939 or Jean Arthur 240-777-7934

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Silverman: "Traffic congestion is destroying our quality of life..."

SILVERMAN ELECTED PRESIDENT TO LEAD COUNTY COUNCIL

The Montgomery County Council today unanimously elected Councilmember Steve Silverman as Council President for the coming year. Silverman, a Democrat elected at-large, is serving his first term on the Council and had served as vice-president since December of 2000. He succeeds outgoing president Blair Ewing.

Councilmember Derick Berlage, who represents Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Kensington, and Wheaton, was elected council vice-president.

While sounding a cautionary note about the economy and a difficult budget year ahead, Silverman targeted traffic congestion relief as his top priority.

"Traffic congestion is destroying our quality of life and this must be our top priority," said Silverman. "While we must be relentless in our pursuit of the large projects for the medium and long-term that rely on state and federal help, we must focus on county transit and road initiatives that offer congestion relief now. We've done a lot. We've got to do more."

"On schools, hard choices on the budget may mean we have to wait on that new gym or new building, but we won't wait to focus on what goes on inside the classroom. We need to close the achievement gap. We need more all-day kindergarten and more smaller classes.

(more...)

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“Ask any teacher who has 16 students in her classroom to talk about results. My son’s former second grade teacher Ms. Wilkins thinks she died and went to heaven. She’s able to spend more time with the kids who face the most challenges – and she sees results.”

Silverman, an attorney with a law degree from George Washington University and a bachelor’s degree from American University, was elected to the Council in November 1998. He serves on the Planning Housing, and Economic Development Committee, where he is the lead Councilmember for Parks and Recreation, and also serves on the Management and Fiscal Policy Committee.

He is a past president of the Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce and served as co-chair of the Silver Spring Redevelopment Steering Committee.

He lives in Silver Spring with his wife Stefanie Weiss, and their son Jordan, who is a fourth-grader attending Montgomery County Public Schools.

Councilmember Derick Berlage, the new Council vice president, was first elected to the Council in 1990. He has served as council president and also served as chair of the National Capital Transportation Planning Board.

He chairs the Council’s Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee and is a member of the Transportation and Environment Committee.

An attorney, he lives in Silver Spring with his wife Susan Mann, daughter Rachel and son Daniel. He is a graduate of Princeton University and New York University School of Law.

See attached remarks of Council President Steve Silverman.

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Remarks by Council President Steve Silverman December 4, 2001

I want to thank all of you on the Council for your confidence and support in choosing me as President for the upcoming year. Each of the last three Council presidents had a signature theme for their year. For Ike, it was the Year of the Child; for Mike, it was the Year of Education; for Blair, it was the Year of Mental Health. Thanks to the just-released budget forecasts, I have a sense mine is going to be the Year of Living Dangerously!

The revenue picture is sobering. Preliminarily, our budget "gap" is over \$200 million. We will face tough times. But we will persevere. And, we will not abandon our commitment to the things residents have told us, time and time again, matter the most.

Budgets, as we all know, are not about money. They're about priorities. So let me take a few minutes to talk about mine.

1: As James Carville might say if he lived here, "It's the traffic stupid." We must answer this question: how do we balance the jobs and housing growth that helps pay for our programs and services with the reality that traffic congestion is destroying our quality of life? The public expects an answer and this must be our top priority.

What can we do? We can't build the Inner Purple line or an I-270 interchange on our own. The state and federal government must build these large projects, and we will be relentless in our advocacy for them. What we can do, on our own and right now, is move forward on county transit and road initiatives that offer congestion relief. There are road projects that need to move from paper to pavement: Stringtown Road in Clarksburg. Nebel Street and Citadel Avenue in North Bethesda. Goshen Road in Montgomery Village. Father Hurley Blvd. in Germantown. The Montrose Parkway.

There are also transit initiatives underway right now. In October, we started Free Wheeling Days where fares are free or reduced on bus routes along the congested I-270 Corridor, in Nancy Dacek's district. With modest funding, we could tackle other high-congestion routes like US29, as Marilyn Praisner has suggested, with more frequent bus service, buy-down of bus fares, and the like. Building a road or a new transit line takes years, but putting a new bus on the road or increasing transit subsidies can be done right now. As Phil Andrews said, when he proposed cutting bus fares two years ago, we have to battle traffic congestion one car at a time. If we do, we can get Montgomery County moving again.

2. Education remains the hallmark of our county, the reason families from all over the globe call Montgomery County home. This year, we will all face especially hard choices. We all may have to wait for a new gym or a new building, but we won't wait to focus on what goes on inside the classroom.

The achievement gap between African American and Hispanic students and white and Asian students remains a chasm. Years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "Many schools are inadequate to the task of providing adequate education and thereby entrance into the mainstream of society." That can no longer be true in Montgomery County. Promoting opportunity has got to be the name of the game.

We must continue the "Call to Action" started by Dr. Weast, supported by our Board of Education and championed by Mike Subin, chair of our Education Committee. To do otherwise, deprives too many kids of the chance to succeed and deprives our community of the fullest contributions all our children can make when they grow up.

That means full-day kindergarten and smaller classes in the early grades for the schools that face the most challenges. That means professional development and adequate salaries for teachers in all schools. We know these efforts work from experience in other states, and we are beginning to see results from our own data. Ask any teacher with 16 students in her classroom to talk about results! My son's former second grade teacher Ms. Wilkins thinks she died and went to heaven. She's able to spend more time with the kids who face the most challenges, and she sees results, on their faces... and their report cards.

3. Affordable housing must also continue to be on the Council's agenda. The Council has taken the lead on affordable housing and this past year Doug Duncan proposed, and the Council acted, to more than double funding for the Housing Initiative Fund. Now comes an equally daunting challenge—actually getting more affordable housing built.

This year, we will have a chance to demonstrate our commitment by streamlining the rules for approving group homes, accessory apartments, and housing for senior adults and people with disabilities, as Howie Denis and others have supported. We can help the young adult with developmental disabilities who can live independently, with assistance from the Jewish Foundation for Group Homes. We can help the World War II veteran who can live with dignity at Victory Housing's Andrew Kim house. And I believe we can do this while striking the right balance between those in need and those already in the neighborhood.

4. As we tackle our fiscal challenges this year, we must also remember we are the New Montgomery, the United Nations of Maryland. Our population is

now 40% minority. For the first time in our school system's history, **no** racial or ethnic group constitutes a majority. Nearly one third of our residents live in a home where a foreign language is spoken. While we should celebrate our diversity, it poses challenges we must face.

We must continue to support our diversity through the countless community organizations that deliver services and, literally and figuratively, act as translators between different cultures and life in Montgomery County. Think of community organizations like Centro Familia, which works with Hispanic women to help them become licensed child care providers. Think of our Korean American organizations that provide English language instruction, computer training, and job training. These groups -- and dozens of other community organizations -- are our partners in serving the people from around the world who now call Montgomery County home.

They should also be partners in positions of leadership, as Ike Leggett has often reminded us. We must work to make sure that our major boards, committees, and commissions, reflect the face of Montgomery County. We need the talent, the innovation, the commitment that representative government provides.

Finally, let me get back to the fiscal challenge. Tip O'Neill often talked about the "ice cream of campaigning versus the spinach of governing." While this may be the year of the spinach, we'll be all right if we remember that every single Council member here, along with our County Executive, cares deeply about our community and its priorities. We will debate how to achieve those priorities in the tightest fiscal times in a decade. We will disagree on strategies and budget allocations. But I know we will do it in a civil manner, with principles intact. That is certainly the least we can do.

As my friend Derick Berlage remarked when he became Council President, "Democracy is the art of thinking independently together." Well, we'll be great artists in the months ahead as long as we remember the words of that great philosopher Jennifer Hughes who said, and I agree, "We're all in this together!" Thank you.